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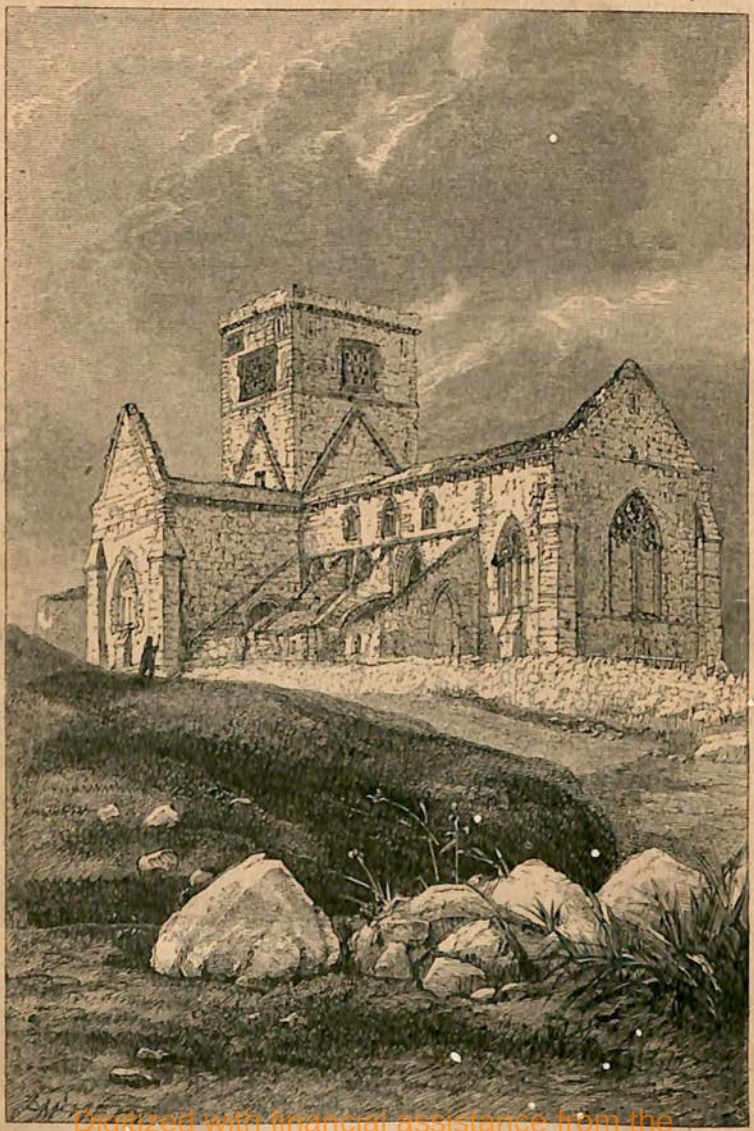

South-east view of Iona Cathedral.

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BY THE DUKE OF ARGYLL.

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CHAPTER I.

NO two objects of interest could be more absolutely dissimilar in kind than the two neighbouring islands, Staffa and Iona:—Iona dear to Christendom for more than a thousand years;—Staffa known to the scientific and the curious only since the close of the last century. Nothing but an accident of geography could unite their names. The number of those who can thoroughly understand and enjoy them both is probably very small. There can be no doubt

which is the more popular of the two. The Aspects of Nature will always be more generally attractive than the History of Man. It requires no previous knowledge, and no preparation of the memory or of the imagination, to be impressed by "Fingal's Cave." I have heard well-travelled men declare that nothing they had seen in any part of the world had ever produced such an effect upon them. There are many larger caverns —there are many more lofty cliffs. But there is nothing anywhere like that great Hall of Columns standing round their ocean-floor, and sending forth in ceaseless reverberations the solemn music of its waves. This is a scene which appeals to every eye, which all can understand, and which none are likely to forget. With Iona it is very different. Its interest lies

altogether in human memories. The stranger must bring with him the knowledge and the reflection which can alone enable him to enjoy what is of real interest in the associations and in the appearance of the place. What he sees upon the Island will not help him much, and a great part of what has to be read about it, will help him less. The buildings which have risen and have decayed upon the ancient sites, and the controversies which have raged around them, belong, one and all, to times far removed from that in which the fame of Icolmkill arose. The most recent description of Iona, and perhaps also one of the most eloquent, is altogether misleading, and gives the traveller a very imperfect idea both of what he ought to remember, and of what he may expect to find. And yet

no one, perhaps, ever visited the Island who was in some respects better qualified to rejoice in its associations than the distinguished author of the "Monks of the West." But an indiscriminate admiration of mediæval superstitions, and the absence of all endeavour to sift fact from fiction in the narrative we possess of Columba's life, mar the reality of the picture which Montalembert gives us of the Past. Nor does the Present fare better in his hands. His disposition to extol the self-sacrifice of his hero, and the incapacity of every Frenchman to understand any forms of natural beauty except those to which he has been accustomed, combine to make his description of Columba's adopted home in the highest degree fanciful and erroneous. It may well be, however, that different minds should

find themselves attached by very different ties to the recollections of Iona, and that there should be a corresponding difference in the form which their impressions take. Its history touches an immense variety of interests—the migration of Races,—the rise of Nations,—the conquests of Christianity,—the developments of Belief. Without venturing into very deep waters on any of these subjects, something perhaps may yet be said of interest to those who visit Iona, and to some also, possibly, who will never see it.

The first great interest of Iona lies in the age to which it takes us back. More than thirteen hundred years have now passed since Columba landed on its shores. It is very easy to speak of such numbers, or to write them; but it is

not quite so easy to have before us a definite idea of the place occupied by the last thirteen centuries in the history of the world. Does the year of our Lord 563 appear to us a very ancient or a very modern date? This will depend entirely on the point of view from which we may choose to look at it. For there is no difficulty in placing ourselves in imagination in a much more distant age, and then, when we turn and look in this direction, the sixth century of the Christian era will appear a long way on towards the present time. On the banks of the Nile it would seem an hour ago. Even on the banks of the Tiber it would not be old. On the other hand, when we measure thirteen hundred years by the changes they have brought, the days of Columba's

ministry will appear remote indeed. And this method of taking our stand at different points of past time, and turning our face alternately in opposite directions, is the only way of estimating correctly the depths into which we look. For the tracts of Time are foreshortened like the tracts of Space. Very often, in a landscape, some difference, hardly perceptible, in the tints of blue, is all that distinguishes between mountains which are really separated by wide valleys or by whole gulfs of sea. In like manner we forget the long intervals of unmemorable time that have elapsed between events which we look at across the space of more than a thousand years. And then, as the sunlight falls very unequally on different parts of a wide horizon, so does the light of History fall very unequally

on different epochs of the past. On the sayings and the doings of some men, who are, nevertheless, among the Fathers of Mankind, it shines so brightly that we hear them speak as if they were speaking at our side; whilst there are many periods, some of them containing many centuries, which are much closer to us, but which lie, as it were, in hollows. We look across them. Columba's age is one of these. The eye ranges over it to those civilizations of the ancient world with which great historians and great poets have made us so familiar. Thus, in some aspects, the age of Cæsar, or of Tacitus, may well seem nearer than the age of Adamnan or of Bede. And yet, if we suppose ourselves to be standing at that point of the history of Rome when her legions first landed in Britain, or a few years

later, when the long line of her Emperors began, how far on, and how far down that line, would the days of Columba seem! If a Roman of the time of Augustus had seen Rome as she was to be five hundred years later, he would have felt as if the end of the world had come. And so it was—the end of the world which he knew and lived in. His eye would have ranged from Rome pushing her conquests on the Nile, the Danube, and the Clyde, to Rome deserted as the seat of government—taken and retaken by Northern hordes, and pouring forth her senate and people to welcome with Imperial honours a barbarian King. And yet, to us, on the other hand, looking back to the days of Columba from the present time, they may well seem to belong to a world which has passed

away. We have only to remember that Columba was the contemporary of Justinian and Belisarius: of the great Emperor, whose genius, or whose fortune, restored for a time the splendour of Roman government; and of the great General who re-established the supremacy of the Roman arms. These events seem to belong altogether to the ancient world. Not one of the great nations of modern Europe had yet been born. The very elements of which they are composed were only then being brought together. All Europe, and a large part of Asia, was one great encampment, not of armies merely, but of Races on the march. Wave was following wave from the exhaustless breeding grounds of the North, sweeping away the dying civilizations of the world, but

depositing a fruitful soil from which later civilizations were to rise. It was the seed-time of all our later harvests. Long before Columba's time these movements had begun. The first capture of Rome by the Gothic barbarians under Alaric, took place a little more than one hundred years before his birth. When he was yet a child, the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy had come to an end, and the body of Theodoric had been laid in that massive tomb which still stands among the marshy suburbs of sad Ravenna. The conquest of Italy by the ferocious Lombards, which to this day connects their name with one of the fairest portions of that country, took place a few years later than Columba's settlement in Iona.

Such were the times to which that settlement takes us back—times of overwhelming and crushing calamity, in all the ancient centres of arts, of letters, and of law. And yet, no sound of these calamities is heard in the calm narrative of Columba's life, as recorded by Adamnan. The petty quarrels of some Irish tribes, and the obscure battles which they fought, seem more important in the eyes of this biographer as fixing the date of the transactions he records, than the most famous contemporary events affecting the most famous countries of the world. It is as if he had never heard of them—as if the sound of them had never reached his ears. But equally unbroken is the silence he maintains on memorable events which were passing much

nearer home. It was only a hundred years before Columba's birth that the Roman legions had been finally withdrawn from Britain. During a great part of that time—probably, during the whole of it—that country which was not yet known by the name of England, was still in the main a Roman colony. Some, certainly—probably many—of the towns and villas whose foundations and whose tesselated pavements are now uncovered only by the plough, or which lie buried under existing cities, were still, in Columba's childhood, the luxurious habitations of a Roman people. But the same great movements which had already overwhelmed the heart of the empire, were now breaking with equal violence on its most distant shores. The old inhabitants of the soil,

who had been subdued by the power of Rome, and in some degree also by her civilization and her laws, were now harassed by the rude barbarians, who had with difficulty been kept at bay even by Trajan, and Severus, and Theodosius. Then the same expedient which everywhere marked the decline of Empire, the employment of barbarians to resist barbarians, is said, in Britain also, to have been the immediate cause of the calamities which followed. Whether the story be true or not, that a British chief invited the Saxon stranger from across the German Sea, certain it is that somewhere about seventy years before Columba's birth, there began the invasion and second conquest of Britain by Angles, and Jutes, and Saxons. During the

whole of his long life that conquest was being carried on, and it was only finally completed as nearly as possible about the period of his death. The Saxons had been then firmly established from the German Ocean to the Severn, and from the English Channel to the Frith of Forth.[1] And this was a conflict more ruthless, and a destruction more complete, than took place in any other Province of the Roman Empire. The Celtic inhabitants and the Roman colonists seem alike to have been destroyed. Their laws, their manners, their Christianity, their language, to a great extent even the very names of places, were swept away before a Pagan race. We know only the general results; we know very little of the details. It is an

[1] Freeman's "Norman Conquest," vol. i. p. 14.

obscure time—a time of which there is no authentic contemporary record. When we think of it, we think of Caerleon, and of Camelot, and of Usk. Out of its broken memories, its traditions of heroic effort, and its sense of sad discomfiture, there arose, in later times, that noble cycle of romance touching the deeds of King Arthur and his Knights, which delighted our ancestors in the Middle Ages, and which again in our own time, and in a purer form, has been revived by Tennyson in immortal verse:—

"For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways
Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,

In that fair order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time."

And the sad work done by internal feuds in bringing in the Heathen and the Stranger is well embodied in the words addressed by the king to Guinevere :—

"Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred, and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea."[1]

So much for the place in secular history, to which we are taken back by the memories and associations of Iona. Let us now, standing on the same spot, lay down similar bearings in the history of the Church. And here the

[1] "Idylls of the King," Guinevere.

impression of antiquity is less striking. The days of the Saxon conquests and of the Picts and Scots are days which, in all secular matters, belonged to a world altogether different from our own; but the relation in which they stand to the later history of the Church is by no means equally remote. There have been, indeed, many subsequent developments of doctrine and of practice. In the main, however, the theology and government of the Western Church had come, or was then just coming, to be very nearly what, until the Reformation, it subsequently remained. The first great battles of orthodoxy had been fought and won. Athanasius—and Ambrose—and Jerome—and Augustine, had lived and died. They had

given form and consistency to that system of discipline and belief which was finally accepted, both by the Latin and Teutonic nations. The Priesthood had firmly established its power, on the gratitude and in the superstitions of mankind. In proportion as the civil power declined, the spiritual power had risen on its decay. The organization through which this power was exerted had risen also by slow and insensible development. Like all strong things, it was not invented. It simply grew. An Order and an Office had been established in the Church, and was accepted as of divine origin, for which, in the narratives of the New Testament, there is not even a distinctive name. In and out of the Christian ministry

the Episcopate had emerged, and out of the Episcopate the Papacy was emerging too. Both these powers arose by a natural, if not by a necessary, process of development. All over the East the chief Pastors in the great cities, which were the centres of the old civilization, had assumed positions always of influence, and sometimes of command. Among those cities, neither lapse of time nor accumulated misfortunes had destroyed the pre-eminence of the greatest Name of all; and in support of the Bishops of Rome, the ascendancy due to personal character had on some memorable occasions come in aid of the ascendancy due to traditional position. Under such circumstances, equality among provincial Bishops was not more

likely to endure than equality among local clergy. The same motives of convenience in respect to government, and in respect to the centralization of authority which operated in each particular community, would operate not less powerfully to establish some one Head in the organization of the universal Church. And then the claim of Right and of Hereditary Succession which arose in the one case was sure to arise also in the other. The growth of opinion, out of which these two kinds of Primacy arose, has been, perhaps, as natural in the larger as in the smaller sphere. Theories are never wanting to account for facts; and those facts, which are in themselves only phenomena of Thought and developments of Belief, never fail to

gather round them congenial interpretations of the Past. Traces of some special prominence in Peter, among the other Apostles, had been discerned or imagined in certain incidents connected with the early Church. Tradition had designated Rome as the scene of his last ministry, and of his martyrdom. The supposed spiritual Primacy of Peter, and the undoubted secular Primacy of Rome, had conspired to re-act upon each other in the minds of men. And so, at the beginning of the fifth century,—that is, about 120 years before Columba's birth,—the lineal spiritual descent from St. Peter of the Bishops of Rome had become widely accredited in the Christian world.[1] The tremendous claims,

[1] Milman's "Latin Christianity," chap. i. p. 83.

indeed, which this tenet was made to bear were as yet appearing only in the germ; but during that century, immediately preceding Columba's time, the two Pontificates of Innocent I. (A.D. 402—417) and of Leo the Great (440—461) had laid deep the foundations of the Papal power. The last years of Columba's own life were contemporary with the Pontificate of the third great man by whom that power was consolidated, and from whose time forwards we are in the presence of the Mediæval Papacy. Gregory the Great was elected Pope in 590; that is, when Columba was seventy years of age, and after his ministry among the Picts and Scots had been carried on from Iona, for seven-and-twenty years. Before he

died in 597, Columba must have heard much of that famous mission of the Roman Monk who came to convert the heathen People which had destroyed Christianity in so large a part of Britain, and from whose country such lovely fair-haired slaves had been brought to the market-place of Rome.

And here we come upon another point of immense interest at which Iona touches the general history of the Church. Columba represents one of the earlier forms of the monastic life, which seems to have materially differed from that which it assumed in the great Orders of mediæval times. And yet the first of those great Orders was founded in his day. As Columba was a contemporary of Justinian, and of Gregory the Great, so

also he was a contemporary of the famed St. Benedict. Twenty-six years before Columba's birth, this remarkable man, then a youth of fourteen, flying from the corruption of Rome, had taken refuge in the caves of Subiaco. There he had moulded into a lasting form the Rule out of which arose the first great Orders of the West. Thirty-five years later, when Columba was still a child, Benedict had removed from holes in a precipice, to the summit of a mountain,—fit emblem this migration, of the larger prospects which had opened to his gaze, and of the wide dominion which his Rule was destined to subdue. On the sunny ridge of Monte Casino, which rises above the valley of the Liris, and commands a

splendid panorama among the hills of Samnium and over the valleys of Campania, he had founded in 494 that retreat which for more than 1,300 years has been one of the most famous Monasteries of the world. But rapid as was the spread of the great monastic Order which poured forth its legions from this centre, more than a century elapsed before they reached the distant shores of Britain. For aught we know, Columba, though he survived him more than fifty years, never heard of the Rule of Benedict. What then was the monastic system in which Columba himself lived, and which he brought with him to Iona? This is a question respecting which there has been much controversy, but which mainly the patient re-

search of Irish antiquarians has solved with tolerable clearness. The interest which attaches to this question is considerable, but its importance may be very easily exaggerated or misunderstood. No special value can be set on the customs of religious life in the sixth century as necessarily affording any indication whatever either of the doctrine or of the practices of Primitive Christianity. Five hundred years is a time long enough for almost any amount of drift. We know what abuses had arisen even in the lifetime and under the eyes of those who had seen the Lord. We know more than this—we know those tendencies of our nature which make it impossible that corruptions should not arise. We know that

one of the chiefest of the Apostles warned the clergy of Ephesus, and through them the whole Church, that they enjoyed no miraculous protection against the growth of error. In the same breath in which he told them they had all been made Overseers of the church by the Holy Ghost, he told them also that out of their own number men would arise speaking perverse things. Accordingly the very earliest Christian writings which have come down to us after those of the Apostles, bear upon their face the unmistakeable marks of deviation and decline. It cannot be too constantly remembered, or too emphatically repeated, that there are no "Apostolic Fathers" except the Apostles. But later writers, in the several centuries to

which they belong, are of immense interest in enabling us to trace the developments of belief and of practice which arise out of all those influences, external and internal, by which our conceptions of truth and of duty are so much determined. And so the life of St. Columba is of special value in enabling us to judge of the intervals that elapsed between certain waves of opinion which at successive periods were propelled from the ancient centres of Christendom, and which, each in turn, finally overspread the whole.

The belief in the virtues of a monastic life was one of these. The idea of it was indeed older than Christianity. In the far East, many centuries before the Christian era,

Buddhism had devoted its thousands to dreamy contemplation. It had found a home also among the sects of Judaism, and the description given by Pliny of the Essenes who retired to the deserts of the Dead Sea, seems almost as if it had been drawn from the monks of a later age. In the earliest records of the Church, which are the records of the New Testament, we hear nothing of it. The community of property practised among the few first disciples, and the command addressed to the young man of great possessions to sell all and to follow Christ, have indeed been quoted as the beginning of, and the authority for, the life of monks. And certainly if it were true that Christ's life in any way resembled that life, then indeed in the

command to follow Him we might see the authority to become an Anchoret or a Cenobite. But there does seem to be an essential difference between the life of Him who went about doing good, and of whom His enemies complained that He "ate and drank with publicans and sinners," and the life of men who stood on the top of pillars or hid themselves in the dens of beasts. Nevertheless it is easy to understand how even so grotesque a parallelism as this has arisen and was sure to arise. Self-sacrifice was the spirit of all Christian service. It was only in the natural course of things that men should forget the essential distinction between self-sacrifice for a good and wise purpose, and self-sacrifice for its own sake, or for purposes neither wise

nor good. And the moment this distinction was forgotten, and religious enthusiasm took a wrong direction, there were powerful causes operating to cut deep and wide this new channel for the devotion of the Church. Many were disgusted by the frightful pollution of the Roman world. Many more were terrified by its overwhelming calamities. Perhaps, all things considered, no period in the history of the human race has been so widely miserable as the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era—when the Empire was breaking up, and when amidst an universal dissolution of manners, and famines, and the ruthless invasions of barbarous hosts, men looked for the end of the world and the terrors of the Judgment. No wonder if even wise and good men should

have concluded, in such a world, that to leave it was the best thing to do. And so it had come to pass that whole populations had poured themselves into the Desert, and at one time in the course of the fourth century it was said that there were more men and women in the monasteries of the Thebaid than remained in all the cities of Egypt.

A great name in the history of the Church is connected with the spread of this passion in the West. When Athanasius came to Rome, he planted its fervour there; and when exiled to the far banks of the Moselle, he imparted it into the rising Christianity of Gaul. We must not confound, however, under one common name, the very great varieties of life which prevailed under different forms

of the monastic system. It seems always to have been a life more active—less merely contemplative—in the West than in the East. The differences of natural character and genius are almost enough to account for this. It is difficult to conceive of any Roman, or of any Goth, or of any Celt, leading the life of Simeon Stylites. The early Monks of the West abjured, no doubt, domestic life, and they generally chose for their head-quarters some retired spot among the mountains or in the forest, or some rock surrounded by the waves. "The bleak and barren isles," says Gibbon, "that rise out of the Tuscan sea from Serino to Lipari, were chosen by the Anchorets for the place of their voluntary exile." In some cases it may be true that they lived

as Anchorets. But in many more they issued forth from their huts or cells to engage in the great work of their time—the work of spreading Christianity in the world. We know almost nothing in detail of the conversion of the Northern nations. But it is certain that in this conversion the various religious communities of Cenobites were active agents. Like all other systems which involve any violation of natural laws, the monastic life was from the very first full of the element of corruption, and the gross abuses which everywhere arose became very soon intolerable. Montalembert complains in melancholy tones, and with touching candour, of that relaxation of morals "which the Religious Orders, by a mysterious and terrible judgment of God,

have never been able to resist."[1] To those who believe that the laws of nature are God's laws, and cannot with impunity be disobeyed, however high may be the motives with which that disobedience is begun, this result will present no mystery at all. But where the impulses of religious zeal were kept pure by contact with the duties of an active public life, and by the noble work of missionary labour, the tendencies to corruption may long have been kept in check. And so it was, that at a time when monastic life in Italy had already become thoroughly corrupt, and when the Rule of Benedict was being established as a great measure of reform, the early religious communities of the far

[1] "Les Moines d'Occident," vol. iv. p. 78.

West were still obedient to the rules of a virtuous discipline and of useful labour. This is the stage at which, and the aspect in which, the monastic life appears in the early history of Iona. Ireland had never been subdued by the Roman arms, and its early Church thus came to occupy a somewhat isolated position in the world. It did not move under the same influences of development as those which determined the ecclesiastical system in other countries. In the time and in the country of Columba, the Celtic monasteries were not only the great missionary colleges of the Church, but they seem to have embraced and absorbed almost all that existed then of an ecclesiastical organization. Something of a Clan connection under the

rule of hereditary families is discernible in the different foundations, and the innate propensity of the Irish Celts to tribal feuds seems to have made these Bodies, in a very literal sense indeed, active members of the Church militant. And yet their religious zeal after its own type and fashion appears to have been of a genuine kind. The study of the Scriptures was universal, and the transcription of them was a passion. Manuscripts still remain which are believed on probable evidence to belong to this time, and tradition ascribes the exile of Columba to fierce contentions for a favourite copy. Nothing altogether like those old Monasteries existed elsewhere then, or has existed anywhere since that time. There were among the

brethren members capable of discharging whatever varieties of function had as yet become distinctively assigned to the different branches of the Christian ministry. How far the more definite rules which now divide those functions, and which elsewhere had been long firmly established, had as yet reached the remote communities of "Scotia," there are, to say the least, serious doubts—doubts which have been very embarrassing to those who depend, in the highest matters, upon the perfect regularity of early times. Such priests as were called Bishops had no local spheres of jurisdiction. There were crowds of them; and although Columba seems to have treated with great respect such wanderers from among them as came to Iona, they were everywhere

entirely subordinate to the Monastic leaders, and they do not themselves appear to have been set apart in the manner which over the rest of Christendom had come to be regarded as necessary to the right constitution of the office. Long after the death of Columba, the Community he founded in Iona seems to have "ordained and sent forth bishops" under circumstances which look very much as if their mission was conferred by the collective authority of the brethren. If any Bishop was present at the consecration, which is a matter of inference only, he appears to have been regarded as the mere organ of the supreme authority of the Abbot and of the Body over which the Abbot presided. All these things have been terrible scandals to later ecclesias-

tical Historians, and have much exercised the ingenuity of Presbyterian and Episcopal controversialists. It is vain, however, to look, in the peculiarities of the Scoto-Irish Church, for the model either of Primitive practice, or of any modern system. As regards the theology of Columba's time, although it was not what we now understand as Roman, neither assuredly was it what we understand as Protestant. Montalembert boasts, and I think with truth, that in Columba's Life we have proof of the practice of auricular confession, of the invocation of saints, of confidence in their protection, of belief in transubstantiation, of the practices of fasting and of penance, of prayers for the dead, of the sign of the cross in familiar—and it must be added—in most

superstitious use. On the other hand there is no symptom of the worship or "cultus" of the Virgin, and not even an allusion to such an idea as the universal Bishopric of Rome, or to any special authority as seated there.

There is, however, one other aspect of Columba's religious life which is thoroughly mediæval, and that is, the atmosphere of miracle in which the whole is presented to us. This is a subject which is full of real mystery. Adamnan wrote his famous Life within a hundred years after the great Abbot's death. He had spoken in his youth with men who had seen Columba. It is after an interval of time so short as this that a Biography is written, almost the sole object of which is to record the miracles, the

prophecies, and the inspired sayings of the Saint. Some of the stories told are not only childish and utterly incredible, but of a character which makes it very difficult to understand how they could ever be seriously believed even in a very ignorant and a very superstitious age. To shut the book and never to open it again might well be our first impulse, when we are told, for example, of a Staff (Pastoral?) accidentally left upon the shore of Iona, being transported across the sea by the prayers of Columba, to meet its disconsolate owner when he landed somewhere on his way to Ireland. What are we to make of stories such as this? Did Adamnan himself believe them? Or had the pestilent doctrine been already established that frauds can be pious, and that falsehoods

can be safely told in the interests of the Faith? It is the fashion now to deal with this difficult subject only by evasion. Montalembert himself repeats all his narratives without letting us clearly understand whether he accepts all, or only some,—or whether he narrates them simply as part of the belief of the times,—as such and as nothing more. Perhaps devout Roman Catholics do not choose to put any question to themselves upon the subject. Believers of picturesque narratives care for the picturesqueness and for nothing else. Philosophical historians have recourse to such generalities as this: "History to be true must condescend to speak the language of legend. The belief of the times is part of the record of the times." [1]

[1] Milman's "Latin Christianity," vol. i. p. 415.

This is all very well, but it is no explanation of the phenomena with which we have to deal; nor can it satisfy any mind which desires to understand them. To believe nothing of the truth of a narrative, and to believe everything of the truthfulness of the narrator, is rather a difficult mental operation. Yet this is very much what is generally offered to us now-a-days by way of compromise. I do not think it possible to explain all the narratives of Adamnan, and other narratives of the same kind, without ascribing much to the effect of deliberate invention. We know indeed what slight additions and alterations made in the telling of a story will transform its whole character after it has passed for a very short time from mouth to mouth, and we know, too,

how this tendency to growth may be nourished to an almost unlimited degree in an atmosphere of credulity where nothing is considered as in itself improbable. It is to be observed, too, that Adamnan cannot have been an eye-witness of any of the wonders he records. But the minute and circumstantial details given by him in the story of the Staff, and in many others equally childish, can hardly be referred to mere traditionary legend. There is indeed another class of stories which are of a different character, and must be regarded from a very different point of view. I refer to those in which the wonder lies not so much in the facts alleged, as in the interpretations which are put upon them. These altogether depend on the predispositions of the mind, and the predis-

position then was to see in all events nothing but their subserviency to the interests of the Christian Church. The escapes effected by Columba from perils by sea and land through the efficacy of his prayers belong to this class. Adamnan's Life is full of them. Putting aside the exaggerations of detail which transform the Providential into the Miraculous, this is to be remembered—that not only may such interpretations be sincere, but what is more, they may be true. Not even the fullest belief in what men vaguely call "The Supernatural" compels us to accept every manifestation of it which a puerile fancy or a superstitious purpose may invent. We are not shut up to the alternative of denying the possibility of Divine Power becoming unusually visible among

men, or else of believing that it is exerted without reason, without measure, and without proportion of Means to Ends. The agencies which work in and through the characters of great men at great epochs of human history, and in the great achievements of their lives, are agencies which may either be called natural or supernatural according to our conception and definition of the term. They are spiritual agencies, and sometimes work in almost a visible manner, through unusual combinations of ordinary laws. Who can measure the power of minds endowed with extraordinary gifts? and who can say how extraordinary these gifts may not sometimes be? Over and over again in the history of the world,

they have achieved apparent impossibilities, and have seemed as if yoking to their service the whole natural course and current of events. Many of the stories of Adamnan turn upon the possession by Columba of the gift of prophecy. There is nothing impossible in this. One prediction of Columba recorded by Adamnan, to which, in the next Chapter, I shall have occasion to refer, has been in course of fulfilment during 1,300 years, and is being fulfilled now by every pilgrim who lands upon Iona. We must remember as a fact that Columba was an agent, and a principal agent, in one of the greatest events the world has ever seen, namely, the conversion of the Northern Nations.

It is not surprising that in such times the providential ordering of events should make a deep impression on the minds of succeeding generations, and that almost every transaction connected with such men should be read in the light which shines from behind the veil. We are almost entirely ignorant of the natural means by which that conversion of the Northern Nations was effected. Such historians as survived the centuries during which it was going on, are as silent as Adamnan on all the details which we should most desire to know. And yet in order to appreciate how marvellous this event was—how extraordinary the agencies must have been by which it was accomplished—we have only to remember that nothing

of the same kind has happened for more than a thousand years. The world is still in large proportion heathen. Christianity is indeed still spreading, but mainly by the spread and migration of those races whose conversion was completed then. Converts are made here and there in our own time. But nowhere now—nowhere during a long course of centuries—have we seen whole nations accepting the Christian faith, and casting their idols to the moles and to the bats. What were the predisposing causes which led to this great movement among the Gothic and Celtic tribes? What was the condition of their own beliefs? What were to them the attractive elements in the new religion? What were the argument-

addressed to them by Columba? Could he quote to them as Paul did at Athens to the Greeks some things which "even their own poets had said"? It is really afflicting that Adamnan gives us no ray of light on these questions, so interesting, and so profoundly dark. One, at least, of the explanations so often given of the influences under which Christianity was extended, cannot apply to the Picts of Caledonia. Christianity was not presented to them in alliance with the impressive aspects of Roman civilization. The tramp of Roman legions had never been heard in the Highland glens, nor had their clans ever seen with awe the majesty and the power of Roman government. In the days of Columba, whatever tidings

may have reached the Picts of Argyll or of Inverness, must have been tidings of Christian disaster and defeat. All the more must we be ready to believe that the man who, at such a time, planted Christianity successfully among them, must have been a man of powerful character and of splendid gifts. There is no arguing against that great monument to Columba, which consists in the place he has secured in the memory of mankind.

The imperishable interest of Adamnan's book lies in the vivid though incidental touches of life and manners which he gives us in the telling of his tales—of life and manners as they were in that obscure but most fruitful time, when the light of a

history had died away, and before the light of modern history had arisen. As regards Scotland, we get behind the age of History, and not only behind it, but behind it by many centuries. The history of Scotland, properly so called, begins with Malcolm Canmore; and before he was born, Columba had been gathered to his fathers for more than 400 years. Those who are very rigorous in the definition of History, and who demand for it as essential the existence of contemporary records, will hold that a much wider gap remains to be filled between the days of Columba and the true beginning of Scottish history. Fordun and the other chroniclers, who are considered the fathers of that history, lived

no less than 700 years later than the great apostle of the Picts. In the days of Adamnan, Scotland was not Scotland, but "Albyn." "Scotia" was then the familiar name for that island which we now call Ireland. In like manner, England was not yet England, and the very foundation of its national life had not yet been laid.

It is in close contact with this dream-land of our national annals, this legendary and almost mythic age, that we find in Columba's Life, not only the firm foothold of history, but the vivid portraiture of an individual man. In regard to many contemporary events of the deepest interest, we have to grope our way to nothing

better than probable conclusions, through the obscure data of philological research. Not one historical character of the time, in connection with any one of the races contending for the mastery in Britain, is in any similar degree known to us. On one spot, and one spot only, of British soil, there shines in this dark time a light, more vivid even than the light of common history—the light of personal anecdote and of domestic narrative. When we land upon Iona, we can feel that we are treading in the very footsteps of a man whom we have known in voice, in gesture, in habits, and in many peculiarities of character; and yet, of a man who walked on the same ground before the Heptarchy, when Roman cities

still stood in Britain,[1] and when the ancient Christianized Celts of Britain were maintaining a doubtful contest with Teutonic heathenism.

In these memories the interest of Iona lies. In the next chapter we shall land upon its shores, and see what is to be seen upon them.

[1] The Roman city of Uriconium, the foundations of which have lately been uncovered by curious antiquarians, was destroyed by Ceawlin, King of Wessex, about 577, which is fourteen years after Columba's landing on Iona, and twenty years before his death.

CHAPTER II.

FROM a rapid view of Columba's time, let us pass to a closer inspection of Columba's Home. We have seen the place which his age occupied in the history of the world, and the character of those events in which he bore a part, or of which he must have heard the fame. Let us now visit the Island which is sacred to the memory of his illustrious life, and look upon the landscape which was familiar to his sight. Dr. Johnson, in a celebrated passage, has condemned the "frigid philosophy" which could regard with-

out emotion the scenes which are associated with the triumph of piety or of learning; and yet in many cases those scenes are so wholly changed that nothing of identity remains except mere geographical position. The places where great men or great communities have flourished and decayed, and which now "know them no more for ever," would often be as little recognized by them, if they were to rise again from the dead. The learned historian of "Latin Christianity" speaks of the beauty of the situations which were invariably chosen by the Benedictine Monks for the monastic sites in England. But when the structure of a country is comparatively level, almost everything which is characteristic in the landscape depends upon features which change in the

course of a very few generations. It depends on the progress of enclosures, on the distinctive colouring of cultivated and uncultivated ground, on the disappearance of forests, on the new disposition of woods and trees. In such situations nothing that we see now may be as it was seen by those whose memory has brought us to the spot. With Iona the case is very different. We may be sure that what we now see is very much what Columba saw. Its distinctive features depend upon the enduring Hills, and upon the still more enduring Sea. To the eye of a geologist, indeed, I know very few situations where every outline tells so distinctly of the most tremendous agencies of change—of volcanic heat and of glacial cold, of upheaval and

of subsidence, of rupture and of abrasion, and of the waste of time. But all these agencies, except the last, have been so long at rest that the human race has been slow to believe in their existence. It is, indeed, the most difficult of all things to form any distinct conception of the nature and the method of their works, or of the part which each of them has had in moulding and configuring the world we see. And, as regards the waste of time, not only all the centuries since Columba's birth, but all the centuries since the birth of man, are but "as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night." The Ocean has been called, by Hugh Miller, "that blue foaming dragon, whose vocation it is to eat up the land:" but the

rate at which it eats up the Hebridean rocks is very slow indeed. The singular and beautiful clearness of its waters round those shores is a sufficient proof how infinitesimally small is the amount of spoil. Nothing, therefore, can be more certain than that, when we look upon Iona, or when we range even the wide horizon which is visible from its shores, we are tracing the very outlines which Columba's eye has often traced, we follow the same winding coasts and the same stormy headlands, and the same sheltered creeks, and the same archipelago of curious islands, and the same treacherous reefs—by which Columba has often sailed. A few changes, of a very superficial kind, may have been brought about. Forests can never have flourished on

those outward slopes which front the Atlantic blasts. But some shaggy brushwood has doubtless disappeared,—the introduction of sheep has made the pastures greener—to some extent the heather has given way to grass. But this is the whole amount of change. All the great aspects of nature upon and around Iona must be the same as they were thirteen hundred years ago.

What, then, are those aspects? To Montalembert they are all mournful and oppressive. He paints the landscape in the gloomiest colours. Its picturesqueness, he says, is without charm, and its grandeur is without grace. The neighbouring isles are all naked and desert. The mountains are always covered with clouds, which conceal their summits. The

climate is one of continual mists and rains, with frequent storms. The "pale sun of the north," when it is seen at all, gleams only upon dull and leaden seas, or upon long lines of melancholy foam. Those who know the Western Isles know how unreal all this sort of language is. The appreciation of natural beauty in its various forms depends mainly upon association, very little upon knowledge or upon conscious thought. The scenery of the Hebrides is altogether peculiar, and to those whose notions of beauty or of fertility are derived from countries which abound in corn and wine and oil, the charms of that scenery can perhaps never be understood. And yet these charms are founded on a wonderful combination of the

three greatest powers in nature—the Sky, the Sea, the Mountains. But these stand in very different relations to the early memories of our races. As regards the Sky there is no speech or nation where its voice is not heard; there is no corner of the world where the sweet influences which it sheds do not form, consciously or unconsciously, an intimate part of the life of men. But it is not so with the Ocean. There are millions who have never seen it, and can have no conception of the aspect of the most wonderful object upon earth. To many who have seen it, it inspires nothing but dislike. By the Prophet of Patmos,—although no image is more frequent in his visions as an emblem of glory and of brightness,—the Ocean is classed in a sublime passage along

with Death and Hell, as among the Holders of the Dead (Rev. xx. 13). And so, in this character at least, we are told that it is to have no place in the New Heavens and the New Earth, where "there shall be no more Sea" (Rev. xxi. 1). The gentle spirit of Mrs. Hemans was troubled by the same aspect of the Ocean, and few more touching verses have been left us by her pen than those which she addressed to the "hollow-sounding and mysterious Main:"—

"To thee the love of woman hath gone down,
Dark flow thy tides o'er manhood's noble head."

The feeling is natural, and, like so many others connected with the dead, we find it enshrined in "In Memoriam:"—

"O to us,
The fools of habit, sweeter seems

"To rest beneath the clover sod,
That drinks the sunshine and the rains,
Or where the kneeling hamlet drains
The chalice of the grapes of God,

"Than that with thee the roaring wells
Should gulf him fathom deep in brine,
And hands so often clasped in mine
Should toss with tangle and with shells."

But, after all, the Ocean is something more than a "vast and wandering grave." Its associations are not mainly with the Dead. Neither is it the only power which seems to dissipate beyond recovery this Tabernacle of the Flesh. The question, "With what Body do they come?" is asked more often of the Forms which have been returned to the dust of Earth than of those which have been lost in many wafers. To eyes that have been accustomed to rest upon the boundless fields

of Ocean, there is nothing in nature like it. The inexhaustible fountain of all the fertility and exuberance of earth—the type of all vastness and of all power—it responds also with infinite subtlety of expression to every change in the face of heaven. There is nothing like its awfulness when in commotion. There is nothing like its restfulness when it is at rest. There is nothing like the joyfulness of its reflected lights, or the tenderness of the colouring which it throws in sunshine from its deeps and shallows. I am sorry for those who have never listened to, and therefore can never understand, the immense conversation of the Sea.

Of the third great power in landscape—of

the Mountains—there is less need to speak. This at least is more generally understood. There are not many places in the world where those three great voices—"each a mighty voice"—the Sky, the Sea, the Mountains—can be heard sounding in finer harmony than round Columba's Isle. It is true that the climate of the Hebrides is a wet one; and hence the perennial verdure which flourishes to the very summits of the hills, in happy contrast with the absolute sterility of a great proportion of all the mountain ranges in the south of Europe. Hence also the wonderful beauty of the skies. "Cloudland, gorgeous land," is a truthful exclamation of the poet. For nowhere is the face of heaven more various in expression than along that line of

coast where the vapours of the Atlantic are first caught by the Highland hills. Byron's famous lines, in which he touches on the difference between the sunsets of the south and of the north, give by no means an accurate idea of that in which the difference really consists. I have seen from Athens "morning spread upon the mountains" along the opposite range of Parnes, and the low sun streaming up the Gulf of Corinth upon the hills of the Morea. Those tints are certainly beyond measure beautiful. But the sunsets which are to be seen constantly among the Western Isles are not, as compared with those of the Mediterranean, "obscurely bright." It is true the colouring is darker, but it is also deeper—richer—more

intense. Nothing indeed can exceed its splendour. And so of the Sea: its aspects around Iona are singularly various and beautiful. On one side is the open Ocean, with nothing to break its fetch of waves from the shores of the New World. On the other side, it is divided into innumerable creeks and bays and inlets, which carry the eye round capes and islands, and along retreating lines of shore far in among the hills. Its waters are exquisitely pure—of a luminous and transparent green, shading off into a rich purple—where the white, sandy bottom is occupied by beds of Algæ. Into these greens and purples on the opposite side of a narrow Sound, dip granite rocks of the brightest red. Then there is the busy

population of the teeming Sea—its shoals of fish—its great mammalia, which are the hugest of living things—its snowy and its swarthy birds, with all the movement of their wings, the arrowy flight of the wild Rock Pigeon (the origin of all our domestic doves), and the occasional sweep of the Peregrine. Whatever a modern Frenchman—even a man of genius like Montalembert—may think of such things as these, there is every reason to believe that they were not repugnant to Columba. He was an Irish Celt. His own early home was in the wilds of Donegal, where the climate is not less weeping, and where a coast of far more frowning aspect fronts the Atlantic Ocean. Some poems in the Erse language have

been handed down as written by Columba; and although they may not be actually his, they are at least very ancient, and represent the kind of imagery which was familiar to his race, and those aspects of nature in which they took delight. There is no melancholy moping over the Sea because it is not always blue, nor over rocks and mountains because they are not rich in foliage.

"Delightful to be on Benn-Edar,
Before going o'er the white sea:
The dashing of the wave against its face,
The bareness of its shore and its border.

"Delightful to be on Benn-Edar,
After coming o'er the white-bosomed sea,
To row one's little coracle,
Ochone! on the swift-waved shore.

"How rapid the speed of my coracle,
And its stern turned upon Derry:
I grieve at my errand o'er the noble sea
Travelling to Alba of the Ravens.

* * * * *

"Beloved to my heart also in the West,
Drumcliff, at Culcinne's strand:
To behold the fair Loch Feval,
The form of its shores, is delightful.

"Delightful is that, and delightful
The salt main on which the seagulls cry
On my coming from Derry afar;
It is quiet, and it is delightful.
Delightful." [1]

Columba may indeed have missed the "oaks of Derry," and that intense love of place which is a passion with the Celt doubtless made all lands but Erin appear to him as lands of exile. But if his eye rested with delight on the "dashing of the wave,"

[1] Reeve's "Adamnan," p. 285-9.

and on the "form of shores," no spot could have been better chosen than that on which he lived and died.

Iona is situated at the southern apex of that long triangular tract of mountain-land which lies to the north-west of the great Caledonian valley, and which, stretching from Inverness on the one side, and from Cape Wrath on the other, terminates in the lofty summit of Ben More, in Mull. In approaching Iona along the south coast of Mull, we see the massive hills of igneous rocks which constitute the great bulk of that large Island, subsiding somewhat suddenly into a long promontory of comparatively low elevation, at first with sharp and broken outlines, due to mica slate, and then with rounded knobs and

knolls of granite, swept naked by the blast along the margin of the sea, but farther inland covered with sheets of moss and heather. Off the point of this long promontory, called the Ross, and separated from it by a Sound of shallow sea about one mile broad, lies Columba's Isle.

The causes which determined Columba in his selection of Iona are not mysterious. Some of them have been preserved in traditions, which are as poetical as they are probably true; whilst others are obvious on a moment's consideration of the position and of the character of the spot. In the first place, it was an Island; and Islands have been always popular with the Monastic Orders. They give seclusion, and, with seclusion, they afford

facilities for the enforcement of discipline. Is it wrong to conjecture, also, that they satisfy that sense of possession which lies deep in human nature, and which has made even hermits rejoice in some rock which they could call their own? And then comes that ground of preference which has lived in the memory of the place for thirteen hundred years, and which must be true, for it stands in unmistakeable harmony with the earlier events of Columba's life, and with a natural character which was full of strong and fierce emotions. He had been the cause—and by no means the innocent cause—of war and bloodshed in his native land. It was the censures of the Church and the contrition of his own soul which drove him into exile,

and to the undertaking of some great labour in the cause of Christ. But the passionate love of an Irish Celt for his native Ireland seems to have burned in him with all the strength which is part of a powerful character. It is most true to nature—that which is related in the memories of his race—that he could not bear to live out of Ireland and yet within sight of her shores. On his voyage northwards in his boat of hides, he must have passed many islands—Islay first, but that, probably, was too large and too near; Jura next, but this also was no place for a hermitage, and the rocks of Antrim were still too close at hand. Colonsay, with its little outlying islet, Oronsay—here was an island of the fitting size. Columba landed; but on

his ascending the heights, the blue land of Erin was still above the Sea. On, then, northwards, once more; and, as the same old poem represents him saying—

> "My vision o'er the brine I stretch
> From the ample oaken planks;
> Large is the tear of my soft gray eye
> When I look back upon Erin."

The next land he touched was the land which he has made his own. If he landed, as no doubt he did, at the spot which continuous tradition has pointed out, he cannot have known, or he must have missed, the entrance to the Sound. Passing through a labyrinth of rocks, his boat was received into a creek which to this day retains the name of the "Port of the Coracle" (Port-na-Churaich)—a port guarded round by precipitous rocks of gneiss,

and marked by a beach of brilliantly coloured pebbles of green serpentine, green quartz, and the reddest felspar. Again he mounted the nearest hill, and here at last the southern horizon was nothing but a line of Sea. And so this hill has ever since been marked by a cairn, which is known to the Gael as "Cairn cul ri Erin," or, the "Cairn with the back turned upon Erin." Farther exploration must soon have discovered to Columba that the Island on which he had now landed had other and more substantial recommendations. On the eastern side was the channel which he had missed, giving much-needed shelter from prevailing winds. Above all, it was—*pace* Montalembert—a fertile Island, giving promise of ample sustenance for man and

beast. It is true Iona is a rocky island, the bones protruding at frequent intervals through the skin of turf. Even there, however, Columba must have seen that the pasture was close and good; and not far from the spot on which he first swept the southern sky, he must have found that the heathy and rocky hills subsided into a lower tract, green with that delicious turf which, full of thyme and wild clovers, gathers upon soils of shelly sand. This tract is called in Gaelic, "The Machar," or Sandy Plain. A little farther on, he must soon have found that the eastern or sheltered side presented a slope of fertile soil exactly suiting the essential conditions of ancient husbandry. At a time when artificial drainage was unknown, and in a rainy

climate, the flats and hollows which in the Highlands are now generally the most valuable portions of the land, were occupied by swamps and moss. On the steep slopes alone, which afforded natural drainage, was it possible to raise cereal crops. And this is one source of that curious error which strangers so often make in visiting and in writing on the Highlands. They see marks of the plough high up upon the mountains, where the land is now very wisely abandoned to the pasturage of sheep or cattle; and, seeing this, they conclude that tillage has decreased, and they wail over the diminished industry of man. But when those high banks and braes were cultivated, the richer levels below were the haunts of the Otter, and the fishing places

of the Hern. Those ancient plough-marks are the sure indications of a rude and ignorant husbandry. In the eastern slopes of Iona Columba and his companions found one tract of land which was as admirably adapted for the growth of corn as the remainder of it was suited to the support of flocks and herds. On the north-eastern side of the Island, between the rocky pasturage and the shore, there is a long, natural declivity of arable soil, steep enough to be naturally dry, and protected by the hills from the western blast.

And so here Columba's tent was pitched, and his Bible opened, and his banner raised for the conversion of the heathen.

The ancient ecclesiastical buildings which are now slowly mouldering to decay, and

which are all grouped within a short distance of each other, mark beyond all question the few acres of ground on some part of which Columba's cell and church were built. And yet the first thing we must do in standing on the spot is to imagine it denuded of all these buildings. They have their own interest and their own beauty. But one and all of them belong to a very different age from that in which Columba lived. One of them —the least and the most inconspicuous, but the most venerable of them all—St. Odhrain's[1] Chapel, may possibly be the same building which Queen Margaret of Scotland is known to have erected in memory of the Saint, and dedicated to one of the most famous of his

[1] Pronounced, and now usually spelt, "Oran."

companions. But Queen Margaret died in A.D. 1092, and therefore any building which she erected, must date very nearly five hundred years after Columba's death; that is to say, the most ancient building which exists upon Iona must be separated in age from Columba's time by as many centuries as those which now separate us from Edward III.

But St. Odhrain's Chapel has this great interest—that in all probability it marks the site of the still humbler church of wood and wattles in which Columba worshipped. There are some things for which tradition may be safely trusted. The succession of generations among men has been compared to leaves of the forest; but, unlike forest-leaves, which all die about one time, and reappear at another

time after a long interval that cuts off the seeming continuity of life, the generations of mankind are renewed from day to day and from year to year; so that the young hold fast the memories of the old, and that which was dear to the fathers is dear to the children also. And thus it is difficult to conceive that the site of Columba's church could ever have been forgotten. It must have been always a sacred spot. Nor is it probable that when Queen Margaret built, she would leave the place which was hallowed by associations so dear to her. We are indeed expressly told by the annalist from whom our information in this matter is derived, that Queen Margaret's 'work was a restoration of St. Columba's church, which

had fallen into decay.[1] But if there be any doubt as to the identity of that spot, there is none as to another spot which is close at hand. This is the "Reilig Odhrain," the ancient burying-place of Iona. Among the tenacious affections of the Celt, there is none more tenacious than that which clings to the place which is consecrated to the Dead. Hither, during more than a thousand years, were carried Kings and Chiefs, even from the far-off shores of Norway, with other men of high and low degree, that their bodies might mingle with the dust of the Holy Isle. And close beyond the Reilig Odhrain, a little to the north-east, and nearly opposite to the western front of the cathedral church,

[1] Reeve's "Adamnan," p. 410.

there is a natural hillock of rock, but covered on most sides by turf, which is perhaps the most interesting spot upon Iona. From its isolated position—from its close proximity to St. Odhrain's chapel, and to the ancient place of sepulture—from its rising beside the old path which runs along the foot of the rocky hills, and divides them from the cultivated grounds—from the splendid view it commands over the sacred objects close at hand, over the sloping fields, the Sound, the opposite coast, and the distant mountains,—this knoll must have been a favourite resort of all the generations of men who lived and worshipped on Iona. Tradition, too, has faithfully preserved in its Gaelic name the identity of the spot. It is called the "Torr-Abb," or

Shaft of Abbot MacKinnon's Cross, made in the year 1489.

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the "Abbot's Knoll." I cannot doubt that it is "the little hill" respecting which Adamnan gives perhaps the most remarkable anecdote in his account of Columba's life. On the last day of that life, Columba, we are told, being now very infirm, ascended a "little hill" (Monticellulum) which overlooked the Monastery; and here, standing for a short time upon the top, and lifting up both his hands, he blessed his now long-adopted home, and he pronounced this prophecy of its fame: "Unto this place, albeit so small and poor, great homage shall yet be paid, not only by the Kings and people of the Scots, but by the rulers of barbarous and distant nations, with their people also. In great veneration, too, shall it be held by the holy

men of other churches." Considering that this prophetic benediction was recorded within the lifetime of men who had seen Columba, and considering the long course of later centuries through which it has been literally fulfilled, we cannot doubt that this is one of the many instances in which men who have left their mark upon the world have exhibited a proud and grateful consciousness of the life they were yet to live when dead, in the memory of mankind.

Standing on this old rocky mound, we can re-animate the scene with very tolerable correctness, as it must have appeared in Columba's life. It is certain that the buildings of his time were all of wood. Probably some external plaster covered the

timbers and the wattled walls of which they were constructed. Like all other works of man, the edifices in which we live, and those also in which we worship, have had their forms determined by a process of development—that is to say, by gradual modifications of rude and early types. It is exceedingly probable that in the very old and ruined stone chapels of the Highlands, we see something not unlike the shape and proportions of the wooden structures of the Columban age. The form is that of a low and simple quadrangular building with steep roof. The brethren of the community lived each in separate huts or "cells," constructed of the same materials. There was some provision for strangers, who

often, though not probably in great numbers at one time, were attracted to the place. There was a refectory for the common meal. Columba's own abode was erected on a rising ground above the rest. Some brethren attended to the cattle, to the milking of cows on distant pastures, and to bringing home the produce in closed wooden vessels carried upon horseback. Others tilled the soil for the raising of oats and barley. There seems to have been an abundant dairy, a well-stored granary, and by no means a deficient larder. The island now supports upwards of 200 cows and heifers, 140 younger "beasts," about 600 sheep and lambs, 25 horses, and some three-score of the pachyderms so dear to all the children of

Erin. It grows also a considerable quantity of grain. But even these resources, ample as they might seem to be, were not enough for the growing number of the Columban monastery. Very soon royal grants of neighbouring islands made them tributary to the sustenance of the Abbot and his brethren, and foremost among these came the productive corn-bearing soil and the rich pastures of Tyree. Fish were abundant and could be obtained at all seasons. The large flounders of the Sound of Iona are still an important item in the diet of its people. The rocks and islets all around swarmed with Seals, and their flesh seems to have been a favourite article of food. Their oil, also, doubtless supplied the light

with which, during many long winter evenings, Columba pored over his manuscripts of the sacred text, or performed midnight services before the altar.

With all these various occupations there must have been constant life and movement both on land and sea. Nor must we forget Columba's own frequent embarkations—sometimes only in little boats to cross the Sound, or to visit those adjacent islands, some of which were soon colonized from the parent Monastery; sometimes in larger vessels, starting on some distant expedition, to preach among the heathen Picts. Columba and his brethren must have been skilled and hardy seamen. How often from this very hill must the monks have watched for their Abbot's re-

turning barque—rounding the red rocks of Mull from the southward, or speeding with longer notice of approach from the north. From the same spot, we may be sure, has Columba often watched the frequent sail—now from one quarter, now from another, bringing strange men on strange errands, or old familiar friends to renew the broken intercourse of youth. Hither came holy men from Erin to take counsel with the Saint on the troubles of clans and monasteries which were still dear to him. Hither came also bad men red-handed from blood and sacrilege to make confession and do penance at Columba's feet. Hither, too, came Chieftains to be blessed, and even Kings to be ordained—for it is curious that on this

lonely spot, so far distant from the ancient centres of Christendom, took place the first recorded case of a temporal sovereign seeking from a minister of the Church what appears to have been very like formal consecration. Adamnan, as usual, connects his narrative of this event, which took place in 547, with miraculous circumstances, and with Divine direction to Columba, in his selection of Aidan, one of the early Kings of the Irish Dalriadic colony in Scotland.[1]

The fame of Columba's supernatural powers attracted many and strange visitors to the shores on which we are now looking. Nor can we fail to remember, with the Reilig Odhrain at our feet, how often the beautiful galleys of that

[1] Reeve's "Adamnan," p. 197-8, and notes.

olden time came up the Sound laden with the Dead,—"their dark freight a vanished life." A grassy mound not far from the present landing-place is known as the spot on which bodies were laid when they were first carried to the shore. We know from the account of Columba's own burial that the custom was to wake the body with the singing of psalms during three days and nights before laying it to its final rest. It was then borne in solemn procession to the grave. How many of such processions must have wound along the path that leads to the Reilig Odhrain! How many fleets of galleys must have ridden at anchor on that bay below us, with all those expressive signs of mourning which belong to ships,

when Kings and Chiefs who had died in distant lands were carried hither to be buried in this holy Isle! From Ireland, from Scotland, and from distant Norway, there came, during many centuries, many royal funerals to its shores. And at this day by far the most interesting remains upon the Island are the curious and beautiful tomb-stones and crosses which lie in the Reilig Odhrain. They belong, indeed, even the most ancient of them, to an age removed by many hundred years from Columba's time. But they represent the lasting reverence which his name has inspired during so many generations, and the desire of a long succession of Chiefs and warriors through the Middle Ages and down almost to our own time, to be buried in the soil he trod.

CHAPTER III.

FOR 200 years from the date of the great Abbot's death, it never fell to the lot of the brethren who frequented the Little Hill of Columba's Benediction to see approaching any other sails than those which came to pay the homage of the living, or the last tribute of the dead. But at the close of that period began the visitation—terrible indeed to all the coasts of Britain—which was due to the last overflow of the Northern nations. Then indeed the friendly Sea, which hitherto had brought nothing to Iona but security and

peace, became the bearer of unnumbered woes. That beautiful Sound of green and gleaming water was covered with ships,—not this time laden with worshippers or with mourners, but with the grim and heathen pirates who swarmed from Scandinavian ports. In the Irish annals there is preserved a short but distinct chronicle of events connected with the monastery of Hy,[1] carried on from year to year. For the date of A.D. 794, there is this ominous entry: "Vastatio omnium insularum a gentilibus" (Devastation of all the islands by

[1] One form of the ancient name of Iona. In Adamnan's Life it is uniformly spelt "Ioua." In the Gaelic language at the present day it is familiarly called "I" (pronounced as E in English), which simply means "Island:" but I am informed that the ancient form used by Adamnan, "Ioua," is still occasionally employed.

the heathen). From this time forward, during a period of no less than 300 years, Iona was frequently ravaged—its churches and monasteries burned, its brethren murdered by the savage Northmen. The bones of Columba were carried to safer places—to Kells in Ireland, and to Dunkeld in Scotland. It must have been towards the close of that period that the church was rebuilt by Margaret, the devout and devoted queen of Malcolm Canmore. And now, once more, the memory of St. Columba was to re-assert its ancient power even over the heathen spoilers. Iona was the only place spared by Magnus, King of Norway, in his great predatory expedition of A.D. 1098. And if St. Oran's Chapel be indeed the

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building erected by Queen Margaret, it is not without interest to think that in that low, round archway, which still remains, we may see the door from which the fierce King Magnus is said to have recoiled with awe when he had attempted to enter the sacred building.

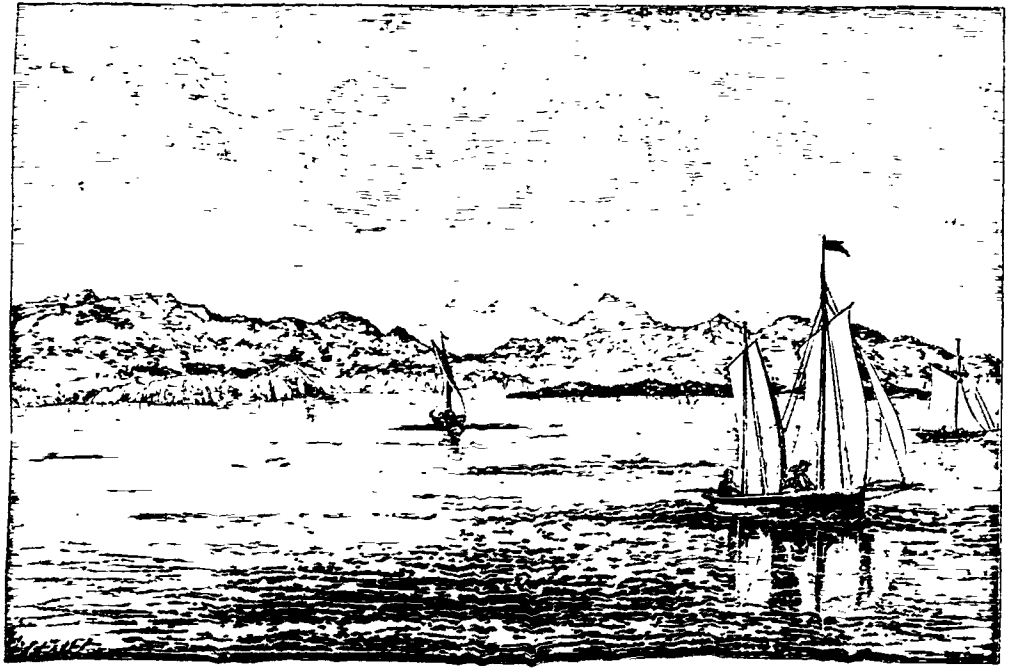
But already we have been carried down the course of centuries far—too far—from the time in which all the real interest of Iona lies. Or if it be indeed part of that interest to look on the ruins of St.° Oran's Chapel, and to think that it may possibly be the very building erected by the wife of Malcolm Canmore, at least let us not forget that the long, long period of 500 years lay between that date, which now seems so old

to us, and the date of Columba's ministry. The grey tower of the cathedral, standing "four square to all the winds that blow," ancient and venerable as it looks, is of still more modern date. The oldest portion of it may belong to the close of the twelfth century[1]—that is to say, more than 600 years nearer to us than Columba's day. All these buildings before us are the monuments, not of the fire, the freshness, and the comparative simplicity of the old Celtic Church, but of the dull and often the corrupt monotony of mediæval Romanism. After all, the real period of Iona's glory was not a long one. It is almost confined to the life of one man, and to the few

[1] Reeve's "Adamnan," p. 411.

generations which preserved the impress of his powerful character.

Let us then for a moment go back to his time, let us look on the Island, as it was before one stone of the churches now ruined had as yet been laid upon another, and let us fill in the background of the picture before us as it is and as it was. Across the narrow strait lie the low, rounded, but rocky hills of red granite which here constitute the Ross of Mull. These, broken up into innumerable rocks and islets, stretch from one entrance of the Sound in the N.E. to the other entrance in the S.W. Looking down the vista of the Sound in this last direction is the comparatively open sea,—with the blue mountains of Jura ap-



Sound of Iona, with Paps of Jura in the distance, looking S.E.

pearing in the far distance to the left over a depression in the hills of the Ross. Towards the other, or north-eastern entrance of the Sound, the horizon is entirely bounded by the coast of Mull, and of the smaller Islands of Ulva and Inch-Kenneth. But these coasts are receding and fore-shortened shores, reaching far up Loch-na-Kael, an arm of the sea which nearly divides the Island of Mull into two parts. Another similar arm of the sea called Loch Scriden branches off to the eastward; and although its line of coast is concealed from the Monastery of Iona by the low granites of the Ross, yet the mountains along its sides and at its farther end give additional variety to the sky lines as seen from Columba's cell. (See Frontispiece.) These two

arms of the sea clasp round the base of Ben More, whose summit appears rising above a great precipitous headland called Bourg. The upper portion of this headland is a great mass of nearly horizontal terraces of trap rock, diminishing pyramidally to the top; half-way down, these terraces break into lofty precipices which run round the headland on every side, and are seen extending along the shores of Loch-na-Kael with little interruption for many miles, but with much variety of height. At the foot of this range of precipices there is a steep green slope (at the angle of rest) into the sea. After rains, a rivulet breaks over the brow of this precipice at the point where it fronts Iona; and when strong winds are

blowing from the westward, the water of this stream is blown off in a cloud of vapour. Grand shadows are thrown, in fine weather, along the range of cliffs, varying with the advancing hour, and with every passing cloud. This great headland, with all its varied and noble outlines, is the most conspicuous object in the view from all the old ecclesiastical sites upon Iona; and during the many years of Columba's ministry, they must have been the most familiar of all outlines to his eye. Far off, along the perspective of the receding shore, and close under the point round which the range of cliff passes out of sight, lies the little Island of Inch-Kenneth—where, in 1775, Dr. Johnson was so hospitably enter-

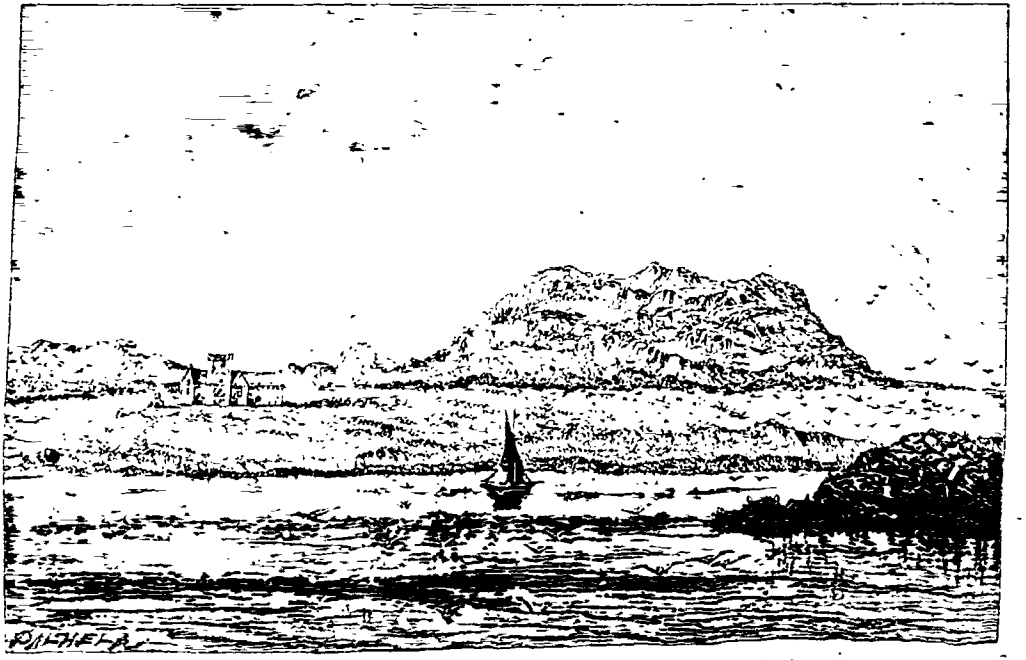
tained. To the left lie the opposite shores of Loch-na-Kael—all hills of trap, disposed in lines, heathy, and receding towards the head of that arm of the sea. Above them, low down upon the sky, rises a portion of the far-off Hills of Morven, lying on the other side of the Sound of Mull.

The slope of arable land upon Iona itself, which lies between its rocky pasture-hills and the shore, rises towards the N.E., and from the Torr-Abb shuts out farther view in that direction. Let us therefore now come down from this point of observation, and follow the path towards the north-eastern end of Iona, along which Columba must have often walked. It brings us presently alongside of an elevated ridge of

ground, which seems like an artificial terrace, and on ascending it this suspicion of its origin will be confirmed. Beyond it, lies a hollow and morass — the only one on the Island—which marks the site of an old reservoir of water for the turning of a mill wheel. Passing along this old mound of dry and pleasant turf, the view to the northward opens considerably. The northern half of the Island of Mull still bounds the horizon with its long low hills of terraced trap covered with dark heathy pasture. But nearer, some six miles off, there is an Island of curious form, flat topped, with precipitous sides, sloping upwards towards the west, and then ending in a cliff singularly sharp in outline. If the sun be low

and shining strongly, casting its glorious light on the precipices of Bourg, and the rocky shores of Gribune, it will be seen that this curious Island is marked with a strange band of columnar shadows, with two dark spots on the face towards Iona. This is Staffa, and one of these dark spots is its now celebrated cave. How strange that this great work of nature should have lain for so many ages so close to one of the most frequented and most celebrated Islands on the shores of Britain, and that not a whisper of its wonder and its sublimity should have been heard among men!

Pursuing our walk towards the northern end of the Island, we regain the road leading to the pastures which seem to have



Iona, with the Cathedral and Dun-i, the highest hill on the Island, from the opposite side of the Sound. Page 111.

been specially devoted to the dairy cows, and along which Columba's brethren brought home to the Monastery their daily pails of milk. As we ascend the slopes which fall away from the foot of Dun-i—the highest hill on the island—we come upon a region of "Link land"—that is to say, of shelly sand, covered with close, soft, and springy grass. This extends in flats, and in swelling undulations, to the rocky shore, or to the point where stormy winds have broken in upon the sward, and scattered the fine sand in wreaths almost as white as snow. From this pasture-land a wide view opens before us to the northward. The hills of Mull are seen terminating in a long promontory and a rocky headland. The intervening wide expanse of

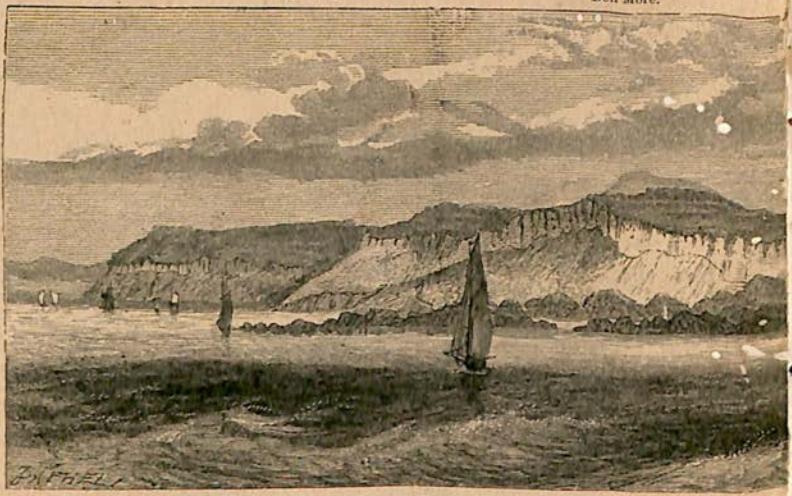
sea is dotted with Islands all of the same curious form and shape—precipitous in the side and perfectly flat in outline, except one Island, out of the middle of which rises a low conical hill, with a perfectly symmetrical outline on either side. This is now known under the name of the "Dutchman's Cap," and is, and must always have been, an invaluable landmark for boats navigating in stormy weather through such a dangerous archipelago of rocks. Far beyond these islands, and far also beyond the headlands of Mull, rises in a clear day a long ridge of sharp and peaky mountains, sinking in noble outlines into the ocean on the west. These are the Islands of Egg and Rum. (See Frontispiece.) And beyond these, again,

Headland of Bourg, and Ben More.

to the right, low down upon the horizon, may be seen, traced against the distant sky in the faintest but purest blue, a sharp serrated range of mountains. These are the Cuchulin Hills, in Skye. To the extreme left—that is, to the west—the horizon is occupied, across some twenty miles of sea, with a low hummocky outline, ending in detached spots of hill, which only appear at intervals above the waves. These indicate the Islands of Tyree and Coll. To the south-west is the open Ocean, with all its vastness, its freshness, and its power.

From this part of the Island also the view to the eastward is finer than from the old monastic sites, because Iona here overlaps the end of the Ross of Mull, and the

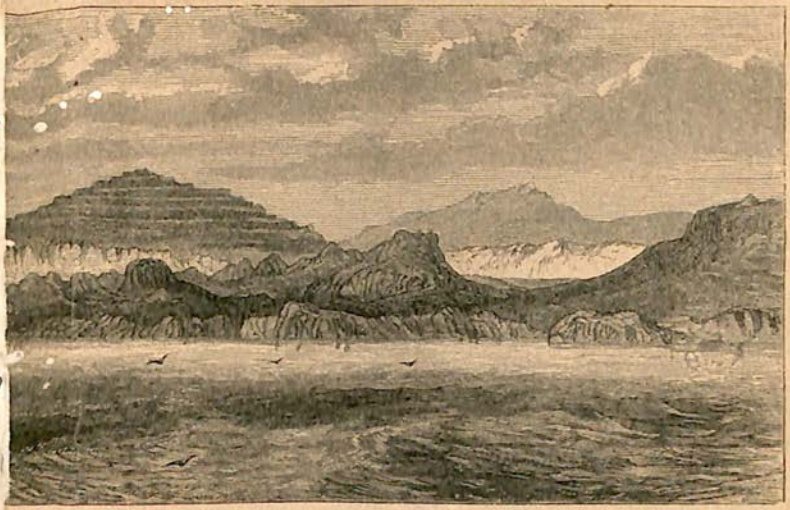
eye ranges along its northern coast, thus commanding the mouth of Loch Scriden, as well as the receding shores of Loch-na-Kael. On a calm fine evening in autumn, when the atmosphere has that singular clearness which is then often to be seen in the Hebrides, I know no view in any part of Scotland more beautiful or varied than the view from the north end of Iona. (See Frontispiece.) The distance on the map from the Cuchulin Hills, in Skye, to the Paps of Jura, is 96 miles. Both are clearly visible, the one to the extreme north, the other to the extreme south. This is indeed a wide horizon, with such a wealth of Cloud and Sea and Mountain as belongs to very few spots in any country.



VIEW FROM THE

VIEW FROM THE NORTH END

Trap Terraces of Bourg. Loch Scridain. Granitic Hills of the Ross. Tormore.



LIG ODHRAIN. See p. 105.

Skye. Staffa.

IONA, LOOKING NORTH. See pp. 112-114.

Returning to the Torr-Abb and the Reilig Odhrain, there is another walk which is of much interest as connected with the detailed account left us by Adamnan of one of the last days of Columba's life.

This account is so characteristic in its combination of incidents, some of which are perfectly natural and others of which are highly imaginative, that it may be well to give a short abstract of it here.

One day in the thirtieth year after Columba's landing on Iona, a sudden flush of colour and a joyful expression were seen by his attendants to overspread the Abbot's face. In a few moments the indications of joy were turned into looks of sadness. Two

brethren who attended at the door of his cell inquired the cause. At first he refused to tell them. He loved them too well to wish to make them sad. But at last he told them how he had long prayed that at the close of this thirtieth year he might be relieved from his labours. And this was the cause of his sudden joy—that he saw angels sent to lead out his spirit from the flesh. But, again, suddenly he had seen those heavenly messengers arrested on the opposite shore; and there they were still standing on the rocks, unable to reach the Holy Isle, because his Lord, who had been willing to grant that for which he fervently prayed, had yielded to the more prevailing intercessions of many Churches. And so

those angels were about to return to the throne above. It was this that had changed his joy. But now he knew that yet four years longer he must remain; and then suddenly, and without previous suffering, he would join his Lord.

And so on that fourth year after this vision, which was A.D. 597, Easter day fell on the 14th April. On a certain day in the following month, the old Abbot was carried in a waggon to see his brethren, who were working in the fields on the plain called the Machar, at the western side of the Island. The road leading to this plain winds for some distance among rocky knolls, and then opens on the comparatively level ground, which, being com-

posed of light soil, and much exposed to the sun, seems to have been then considered the best for tillage. It was now probably the seed-time of that early husbandry. On reaching the monks who were engaged in labour, he told them that with desire he had desired, during the late Paschal commemoration, to join Christ his Lord; but, that the joy of their festival might not be converted into mourning, he had been willing that the day of his departure should yet a little longer be deferred. He then addressed to his saddened brethren some words of consolation, and, still sitting in the vehicle, he turned his face eastward to the holy sites, and pronounced a benediction on the Island and

on all its inhabitants. He was then carried back to the monastery.

It was not many days after this that on Sunday, during the celebration of the mass, the Abbot's face was again seen to be suffused with sudden colour. The old vision had re-appeared. An angel of the Lord, he explained to those about him, was evident to him—sent to seek for something which was beloved of God, but which still remained on earth. What that something was he did not say.

On the last day of that week, the Saturday, Columba went, with his special attendant, Diarmaid, to bless the Barn or storehouse of the Monastery. He found it so well supplied, that he told them he rejoiced to see that, although he was about

to leave them, they would not suffer from lack of food. Then turning to Diarmaid, he said, "This Saturday (the old Sabbath) will be a Sabbath indeed to me; for it is to be the last of my laborious life, on which I shall rest from all its troubles. During this coming night, before the Sunday I shall, according to the expression of the Scriptures, be gathered to my fathers. Even now my Lord Jesus Christ deigns to call me; to whom, this very night, and at His call, I shall go. So it has been revealed to me by the Lord."

Having so said, Columba moved from the Barn, and walked back towards the Monastery. In the middle of the way he sat down to rest, at a spot which, in Adamnan's time,

was marked by a cross, and which is very likely indicated by M'Lean's Cross at the present day. At that point the old traditional path takes a turn, and begins a slight ascent. Whilst the Abbot was sitting here, the old white horse, which was wont to carry the milk-pails to the Monastery, is recorded to have come up to his old master, and, putting its head into his lap, really seemed to weep. It was after this rest by the wayside that Columba ascended the Torr-Abb, and uttered that prophecy on the future fame of Iona which has been already quoted. After this he returned to his cell, and was occupied for some time in his favourite work of transcribing the Holy Scriptures. He was engaged on the 34th Psalm, and had

reached the 9th verse, and the words, "There is no want to them that fear Him." These brought him to the foot of the page. "Here," he said, "I must stop. Let Baithune write out the rest." He then repaired to the church, and attended the vesper services. Returning to his cell, he lay for some time on his bed with its stone pillow, which in Adamnan's time was preserved beside his tomb. Thence he dictated to his one attendant his last orders to his brethren. It was in substance the old message which men like Columba give when the storms of life are over, and when charity and peace are seen to be the great needs of earth.

After this, Columba lay for a while in silence, until, called by the matin-bell before

the dawn on Sunday morning—as it has been calculated, the 9th of June,—he rose, and running before all others, entered the church alone. The building, as the Brethren approached, seemed to be filled with an angelic light, which, however, had disappeared ere his attendant entered. "Where art thou, father?" said Diarmaid—for the Monks had not yet come with lights, and he had to grope his way in darkness. There was no reply. Columba was at last found lying before the altar. Then followed that last scene of all, which so many generations of men have been called to see—the lifted head, the voiceless movements, the sinking powers, —all the visible approach of death. A crowd of weeping Monks, holding up their lan-

terns, soon stood around the dying Abbot. Once more his eyes were opened, and visions of glory seemed to pass before his face. His limbs were now powerless; but his right arm was raised by Diarmaid. With his hand, although speechless, Columba was still able to give the sign of Blessing. When this was given, he ceased to breathe.

Can anything be recalled of the aspect of that man who then lay dead, now twelve hundred and seventy-three years ago? Adamnan has preserved many particulars which assure us that Columba had all those physical characteristics which have a powerful influence among rude nations. He was of great stature. He had a splendid voice. It could be heard at extraordinary distances, rolling forth the

Psalms of David, every syllable distinctly uttered. We are told by his biographer that his singing, with a very few of his brethren, of the 45th Psalm, made a profound impression on a Pictish king, whose priests had attempted to arrest his worship. He had a grey eye, which could be soft, but which could also be something else. He had brilliant gifts of speech. With ceaseless energy he worked at all hours in prayer, or in reading, or in writing, or in some other holy labour. He seemed to have almost superhuman strength. In vigils and in fasting he was equally indefatigable. And with all these exercises and labours his countenance shone with a holy joy—as if in his heart of hearts he was gladdened by the abiding spirit of his Lord.

Such is the noble picture left us by Adamnan of Columba's character and of his appearance. But the details of his life prove that his character had mellowed and ripened towards its close. Beyond all doubt his natural disposition was fierce and passionate; and when he came across deeds of violence or injustice, his indignation was uttered in terrible denunciations. But he was also affectionate, grateful, compassionate—easily moved to tears. He is repeatedly described by Adamnan, as of angelic countenance. In all probability, it was a face, like the skies of the Hebrides, of various and intense expression.

Perhaps some of those who visit Iona may desire to know the place it occupies in that

more ancient History which was a hidden manuscript in Columba's days. His voice must often, indeed, have sounded from before the altar the words of the 95th Psalm: "The Sea is His, and He made it: and His hands prepared the dry Land." But it probably never entered into his mind to conceive that man could ever attain to any knowledge of the methods of creation, or of the steps by which, through unnumbered ages, the world we live in has been moulded into the forms we see. Yet this knowledge, in some measure at least, has been attained.

Iona is entirely composed of strata which I believe to belong to the oldest sedimentary rock yet known as existing in the world. That rock is the "Laurentian Gneiss"—so called

from the great area it occupies in the Valley of the St. Lawrence. It was in this formation that, some years ago, was discovered in Canada a fossil called the Eozoon Canadense—a name indicating the belief of Palæontologists that in this fossil we have a Form belonging to the Dawn of Life upon our planet. The whole of the Outer Hebrides are composed of this gneiss, and it is the basement upon which are piled the mountain ranges of the north-west coast of Scotland. In Iona the formation consists of a great series of strata, which, from a position originally horizontal, have been tilted into a "dip," which is nearly vertical. The "strike" of the beds—that is to say, the direction of their upturned edges—is the direction of the longer axis of the

Island, from north-east to south-west. The strata are of every variety of character—of slate, of quartz, of marble with serpentine and of a mixture of felspar, quartz, and hornblende, which passes frequently into a composition closely resembling granite. Many of the beds are traversed and permeated by veins and streaks of a green siliceous mineral which has been called Epidote. Strangers visiting Iona, who have time to do so, should take a boat from the landing-place to the Port-na-Churaich—the creek where Columba landed. In passing along this part of the shore with its successive bays and creeks, a fine view is obtained of the contorted stratification; and the colouring of the rock near the Port itself, seen through the clear ocean

water, is singularly beautiful. It is, perhaps, vain to speculate, and yet a geologist cannot fail to do so, as to the nature of those "metamorphic" agencies which have converted matter, once consisting of soft marine deposits, into rocks so intensely hard, and so highly mineralised. The beach of the Port-na-Churaich, which consists of fragments of these rocks rolled and polished by the surf, is almost like a beach of precious stones.

The mountains of Mull, seen from Iona, are almost entirely composed of volcanic rocks; yet not a vestige remains of the volcanic vents out of which those great masses of melted matter have been poured. In all probability the volcanic action has been prolonged at intervals through vast periods of

time. Some of the trap mountains of Mull rest on beds of the Old Red sandstone ; others of them are piled on strata of the Oolite and Lias ; others, again, cover the *débris* of Chalk, and belong to a period more recent than the middle Tertiaries. In a line between Iona and the headland of Bourg there is a low basaltic promontory, called Ardtun, which has revealed to us the fact that once there existed on this area some great country covered with the magnificent vegetation of the warm climates of the Miocene Age. Nothing of that country or of its vegetation now remains except a few autumnal leaves sealed up under sheets of lava. The whole of it has "foundered amidst fanatic storms;" and even of the new surfaces which

arose out of the volcanic outbursts only a few fragments remain, broken up into capes and headlands and caverned islets in the sea.

From that period there is a great gap in the geological record, which no man can fill. But at last, far, far down the stream of Time, one other distinct and legible page of manuscript has been left. It tells no longer of Fire, but of Ice. To the north of the Cathedral, not far off, there lies half embedded in the soil of Iona a gigantic boulder of the granite which belongs to the opposite side of the Sound. It contains more than 200 tons of stone. There is but one agency in nature which can have transferred that boulder from the opposite coast and deposited it where it

now lies. Two other blocks of nearly equal mass lie on the other shore, as if they had been arrested on their way, and as if the icy raft on which they took their passage had failed to carry them across the ferry. During the Glacial Epoch great masses of ice must have descended from the mountains of Mull, and pressing over the low promontory of the Ross, sent floating icebergs to Iona, and to the open sea.

Those who walk to the north end of Iona, or those who pass it by sea, will observe a tract of blowing sand almost as white as snow. The origin and the effects of this sand are curious, and are among the many illustrations which nature affords of the power of small

operations carried on unceasingly through long periods of time. It occupies comparatively a small space upon Iona; but on some of the other Hebridean Islands it covers many hundred acres. It is entirely composed of the pulverised shells of two or three species of small land-snails, particularly *Helix virgata*, and *Helix caperata*, and *Bulimus acutus*. These species live and die in such countless myriads on the short clover pastures near the sea, that their fragile shells, yearly accumulating, gradually raise the surface of the soil, until it attains a depth of several, sometimes of many, feet. So long as no break of surface occurs, the grasses and clovers which flourish on it make it useful pasture-land—although there seems to be hardly any

nixture of earthy matter. But when the wind once effects a breach in the turf, the light powdery material below is driven like snowdrifts before the gale—and this process (unless it be stopped by artificial means, such as planting bent-grass, and turfing over the broken surfaces) goes on until the whole is blown away, and the bare rock or gravel which may lie below alone remains. Then the cycle of operations begins anew—a few hardy grasses skin over the stony surface—the snails again begin to multiply and die—until again a calcareous soil is formed. But in the meantime the drifted material has, perhaps, overwhelmed whole farms of better soil, and converted them into a wavy waste of loose and barren sand. This calamity has

happened in Tyree; and one ancient church, with its burying-ground, may be seen deserted in the middle of an absolute waste.

From these few words of description, it will be seen that Iona itself, and the view from it, present to the eye or to the mind at once some of the surest results and some of the most difficult problems of geological science. There are proofs of the succession of Life through ages which are vast and indefinite, but which are not illimitable. There are, or there seem to be, "traces of a beginning." But, on the other hand, there is the question raised whether this apparent dawn is a real dawn, or whether the absence of higher organisms be not due to subsequent oblite-

ration. There is the certainty of a definite order of events in the redistribution of Sea and Land, and of whole cycles of change in the climates and in the productions of the globe. But how those changes were brought about, and whether the agencies producing them were always slow and gradual, or frequently sudden and violent —all this is hidden in the thickest darkness. There is visible demonstration that even the most enduring forms of nature round us are of very recent date, and that it is only in comparison with the span-like shortness of human life that we can speak of the "everlasting Hills." But how those Hills were raised, and their shapes determined, and the valleys formed, and the

broken remains of older lands scattered among the waves—these are questions on which we can only speculate, and speculate perhaps in vain.

The Magnitudes of Space and Time are too often felt as oppressive to the human spirit. Yet in the inspired utterances of the Old Testament they are regarded, not indeed without emotion, but without dismay. The Prophets of Israel seem to have felt all that we can feel of the vastness of Nature. It moved them to exclaim, "What is man?" but it did not shake the faith with which they added, "That Thou art mindful of him." And this triumphant faith is in harmony with reason and with science. The Mind which is able to conceive those Magnitudes of Space and Time,

and which indeed is unable to conceive either any limit of Space or any end of Time, is itself the greatest Magnitude of all. We see and know that its appearance in the world has been the crown and consummation of creative ages. Every fact which concerns its history and its destinies is of a different and a higher order of interest than any other fact which concerns only the preparation of its abode. If the mere bigness, or the mere age of things, were the measure of interest attaching to them, then the arrival of the granite boulder on its floe of ice was a far more important event than the arrival of Columba in his boat of hides. The boulder still lies where it lay for thousands of years before his

time. Columba's body has been resolved into indistinguishable dust. But what he did and said has acquired a permanent place in the history of that Being for whom the Sea has been made and the dry Land "prepared." The years cannot be counted which elapsed between the deposit of the Laurentian Gneiss and the close of the Glacial epoch. Certain it is that, compared with them, all the years of Man's history are few indeed. Yet half the years of a single human life have conferred upon Iona its imperishable fame; and once more standing on the Abbot's Mound, we may repeat with him the words of that prophecy which has been, and is being still, fulfilled: HUIC LOCO, QUAMLIBET ANGUSTO ET VILI,

NON TANTUM SCOTORUM REGES, CUM POPULIS, SED ETIAM BARBARARUM ET EXTERARUM GENTIUM REGNATORES, CUM PLEBIBUS SIBI SUBJECTIS, GRANDEM ET NON MEDIOCREM CONFERENT HONOREM: A SANCTIS QUOQUE ETIAM ALIARUM ECCLESIARUM NON MEDIOCRIS VENERATIO CONFERETUR.

THE END.

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